

North Dakota Department of Transportation NEWS

July 20, 2009

Contact: Janel Schmitz, Public Information Coordinator, North Dakota Department of Transportation
701.328.4575

Make safety your responsibility when traveling this summer in rural areas

The North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) is encouraging motorists to keep safety first when driving this summer. Because of the unique driving challenges, it is extremely important to be attentive on rural roads.

Over the past seven years, nearly nine out of 10 fatal crashes occurred on rural roadways. In 2008, the highest rates of fatal crashes occurred in July and August.

There are a number of reasons for this. Linda Butts, Deputy Director of Driver and Vehicle Services at NDDOT states, "People living in rural areas are very familiar with the roads, and develop a false sense of security. As a result, rural residents are not wearing their seat belts and may not always slow down as needed to safely navigate the road.

Alcohol is frequently a factor in car crashes, as well as a lack of seat belt use. Butts continues, "You can't call a cab in rural areas, so people who have been drinking tell us they need to drive their vehicle home. Only one drink can impair your ability to react, so the importance of designating a sober driver cannot be overemphasized."

There is also a misconception that seat belts are important for busy roadways such as interstates, but not in rural areas. Data shows that most fatalities occur in single-car crashes in rural areas, thus discrediting the notion that seat belts are only important on busy roads. Today, cars are engineered so a person in a seat belt is offered significantly greater protection than the person without.

As of June 30, 60 people have died on North Dakota roadways; 25 of these were alcohol-related and 36 of them were not wearing seat belts.

While the cost of a life is the ultimate price a person will pay, a Driving Under the Influence (DUI) conviction can cost up to \$10,000 for a first-time offense, according to the NDDOT. The costs come from fines, towing expenses, alcohol evaluation, lawyer and court fees, and increased insurance rates. For more details on the financial cost of a DUI, go to www.dot.nd.gov.

The NDDOT offers these important tips for driving on rural roads this summer.

- Always wear a seat belt.

- Only drive if you are sober. Even one drink can influence your ability to react quickly.
- Be careful in construction zones, and follow all signs. Watch for workers and provide them the courtesy of slowing down.
- Be mindful at intersections, a common location for crashes. Look left, right, and then look left again before proceeding.
- Never talk or text on your cell phone while driving.
- Watch for slow moving vehicles.
- Keep to the right side of the road. Drivers tend to drive more toward the center on gravel roads.
- Always yield the right of way in unmarked intersections. Do not assume the other car is stopping for you.

###